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**Membership Criteria**

**and**

**Code of Practice**

**Last updated June 2022**

**1. Background**

The Causeway Coast and Glens Food and Tourism Collaborative Network was originally established in February 2017. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, following an Expression of Interest exercise with local companies involved in the CCAG Food Network, facilitated the creation of the original network Management Committee and the application to the Invest NI Collaborative Growth programme to undertake a Phase One Scoping Study. Phase One funding was awarded in August 2017, and over the next 12 months the Management Committee worked with key stakeholders to prepare a detailed Scoping Study, which identifed the size, capacity of the food and drink sector, the current supply chain, the unique selling proposition, new commercial opportunities and routes to market and how to harness the development opportunities around food tourism. The key barriers and challenges were also identifed. There was recognition of the need to commercialise the work of the Network to drive to position the sector as a driver of significant economic growth and job creation and a key component of the wider tourism destination offer.

Following the Scoping Study, the Collaborative Network made a successful application to the Invest NI Collaborative Growth Programme - Phase Two for a period of three years up to April 2022). The Phase Two project was a three-year programme of work, set out in a series of SMART Objectives and associated actions, which was developed to build on the research and evidence base provided in the Phase One Scoping Study. The funding supports an Invest NI facilitator to work on behalf of the network and deliver the SMART Objectives. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council also provides financial support for marketing, business support and events. The facilitator also applies to other funding sources on behalf of the network, including Tourism NI and DAERA.

**2. Management and Governance**

Taste Causeway is managed and governed by the Collaborative Network Management Committee made up of 15 companies who are representative of the local food and drink sector and are supported by a number of local and national stakeholder organisations (See website for further details).

The role of Committee Chair is held by the Invest NI Lead Company, Leona Kane, Director, Broighter Gold Ltd. All companies on the Management Committee have signed and returned an Invest NI Letter of Adherence and have accepted and signed up to the Management Committee Operating Guidelines. All companies have also made a financial contribution of £500 to the operation of the network for a three year period.

In November 2019, the network set up a Community Interest Company. Taste Causeway CIC has a small board who is responsible for the financial sustainability of the network in the future and is also the owner of the Taste Causeway brand which is trademarked.

**3. Membership Application Process**

The Taste Causeway Committee fully recognise the importance of developing the Taste Causeway network and encouraging other food and drink businesses to sign up to the Taste Causeway proposition and brand values and engage with the digital platform and other activities.

The Taste Causeway Committee has already invested significantly in the Taste Causeway brand and digital platform, which was officially launched at Balmoral in May 2019. Usage of the brand is set out in the Taste Causeway Brand Guidelines PDF document. Initial interest from commercial buyers and the media has been exceptionally high, further demonstrating the value of the brand and the collaborative approach.

Membership of Taste Causeway is open to food and drink related businesses (Producers, Hospitality, Retail, Distributors and Wholesalers, Food and Drink experience providers) who meet the Membership Criteria and Code of Practice which is set out in writing below.

Only signed up and approved businesses who have signed up to and paid the membership subscription services, will be given permission to use the Taste Causeway brand and avail of wider services and initiatives. Businesses are invited to sign up via a short online application form.

Applications will be assessed at the next monthly Management Committee meeting. Our primary objective is to actively encourage businesses to embrace local food and drink in their business model but we do understand that this may take time to implement, something which Taste Causeway is happy to assist with. Therefore, we put great onus on, and weight accordingly, the applicant’s plans to achieve the criteria over a 6 -12 month period.

The final decision rests with the Management Committee. Successful applicants will be required to submit the necessary evidence to support the application within 6 months. The Committee reserves the right to withdraw permission if the Code of Practice is not upheld or the plans submitted do not materialise.

**4. Membership Criteria and Code of Practice**

The Membership Criteria and Code of Practice has been developed by the Management Committee to ensure the Taste Causeway commitment to quality and its mission statement and brand values are protected which are:

**Mission Statement**

*Taste Causeway brings together like minded people in our local area, under one recognised Food and Drink brand, to learn, support and grow together.*

*Showcasing the finest produce, experiences and hospitality we have to offer to our guests.*

*Advocating for our community and our culture with Taste Unrivalled.*

**Brand Values**

***Purpose*** *– The drive, the want, the love. Our ambition is to build a brand synonymous with our people, our place and our passion*

***Community*** *– Bringing together like-minded people in our corner of the world. Working together and supporting each other. Driving growth and bringing prosperity to our community.*

***Culture*** *– Experience our way. Sharing our stories and our knowledge of living well and eating well.*

***Local*** *– Experience local. Our food and drink is a product of our Causeway Coast, our mythical Glens, our special towns, villages and rural landscapes.*

***Responsible*** *– We are always responsible. For our land, our produce, our planet and our story.*

**All businesses must commit to:**

1. Collaborating with other Taste Causeway businesses to achieve common goals through sharing and exchanging information, group training, collective marketing initiatives & participation in joint networking opportunities, within the normal limits of competition.
2. Meeting & exceeding customer expectations in terms of provenance, quality, safety, marketing & presentation.
3. Upholding and contributing to the Taste Causeway Brand values. Any business deemed to be undermining or devaluing the Taste Causeway brand will be removed from listings/marketing activity.
4. Participation in Taste Causeway events, trade shows, networking and business support activity where applicable. Any third-party payments must be received in full before event.
5. Utilising Taste Causeway branding and marketing material as set out in the Taste Causeway Brand Guidelines.
6. Active participation in Social media using templates provided. Abiding by the Taste Causeway Social Media Strategy in relation to all social media posts using the Taste Causeway social media platform.
7. Timely payment of the annual subscription fee. Access to benefits will only commence on receipt of fee.
8. All businesses should have appropriate Public Liability and Employers Liability to participate in Taste Causeway events, shows etc. any third-party costs i.e. reduced entrance fees etc must be paid before the event starts.
9. All businesses where applicable, must be registered with local Council and have a Food Rating of 4.

**In addition, producers must be:**

1. Be either

a) A Producer of primary products from the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area\*

or

b) A Primary Processor in the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area and registered with the CCAG Environmental Health Office (EHO)\*\*

or

c) both the above

1. Actively promote your product with relevance to place i.e. actively promote the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area as part of their marketing message.
2. Producing quality local food & drink products which comply with all relevant regulatory requirements i.e. food safety and hygiene.
3. Sourcing local raw materials and ingredients were possible and to keep full sourcing and traceability records.
4. Continually improving & innovating with regards to product quality, marketing & customer service.
5. Adherence to ethical practices with regard to labour & employment practices, animal welfare, environmental practices & product labelling declarations as appropriate.

\*The Taste Causeway Food Destination is currently defined as the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area. We recognise however that there may be companies operating on the periphery of the Council area but can demonstrate an affinity with the Taste Causeway brand and ethos, or who operate as a tourism business operating within the wider Causeway Coastal Route. These will be assessed on a case by case basis by the committee. These companies may not be able to avail of Council funded business support.

\*\* In very specific circumstances, and subject to Committee approval, certain exemptions may apply to processor criteria:

*Local start-up to established processors who wish to develop new products/up-scale production capacity, but due to its specialist nature (i.e. shelf life, accreditation etc), expensive plant and equipment or capacity issues have to avail of specialised production facilities outside of the destination, such as NWRC Foodovation or Loughrey. Businesses falling into this category must provide evidence why this is the case and how they will commit to establish production facilities in the destination in the medium to longer term. The context, time allowance, and the review period will be assessed on a case by case basis by the Taste Causeway Committee.*

**In addition, Hospitality businesses must demonstrate a commitment to:**

1. Achieving a minimum of around 30% locally sourced ingredients on menu listings within a 12 month period (food and drink). Local being defined as a 30 mile radius of the Giant’s Causeway Visitor Centre. Produce may alter according to season, it is the approximate balance of local vs other that is important to us.
2. Actively promoting and name checking locally sourced ingredients on menus and showcasing local food and drink producers through tasting events, social media and website posts
3. Hospitality businesses who have achieved the desired balance of locally sourced vs other sources will be entitled to apply to and use the Taste Causeway Hospitality Accreditation mark when promoting their business when the accreditation programme is launched.

**In addition, Retail businesses must demonstrate a commitment to:**

1. Retailing at least 6 local producers collectively in one dedicated retail space
2. Working collaboratively with Taste Causeway facilitator on the production of associated Taste Causeway Point of Sale material
3. Actively promoting the availability of local Taste Causeway products via social media and traditional marketing channels
4. Working with producers on in-store tastings, talks etc where feasible.

**In addition, Food & Drink Attractions/Experience Providers must demonstrate a commitment to:**

1. Provide bookable food and drink related attractions and experiences which are attractive to our identifed target markets
2. Collaborate with local food & drink producers/hospitality businesses and work with the facilitators to develop new attractions and experiences which are attractive to our identifed target markets.

**5. Membership Fees and Benefits**

All businesses who sign up to the Taste Causeway Membership Criteria and Code of Practice criteria and are approved by the Management Committee will be listed as a Taste Causeway member and will receive a quarterly bulletin on Taste Causeway activities. There is no cost associated with this basic listing.

To avail of the wider membership services and to utilise the Taste Causeway brand, an introductory annual membership fee, will be invoiced annually, starting on the month following successful application. The fee is based on a sliding scale, based on number of employees

* 0 -3 employees £65
* 4 -15 employees £125
* Over 15 employees £175

**All monies from membership fees are held in the Taste Causeway bank account and will be re- invested into promotion of the Taste Causeway Brand, marketing activity, attendance at events and any planned exchange visits and development of the digital platform.**

The Taste Causeway Brand Guidelines communicate the essence of the brand and set out strict regulations around its use. The Brand Guidelines PDF document is issued to approved businesses**.**

The membership fee will entitle paid up/approved companies to the following minimum list of benefits:

* A listing, short profile and photograph of the business on the Taste Causeway website and links through to their own company website. (Template provided)
* Usage of the Taste Causeway brand and marketing collateral.
* Access to the Taste Causeway social media platforms to disseminate company information (Social Media template provided).
* Inclusion on the circulation list for all information on food and drink related training, commercial opportunities
* Inclusion in Taste Causeway marketing campaigns, press, editorial, news
* Participation in networking events available (locally and NI)
* Participation in events and shows, showcasing your products/services under the Taste Causeway brand.
* Access to the member only portal availing of potential cost savings in logistics, distribution and online booking and ecommerce platforms
* Business starts have access to the knowledge/experience/contacts of more established businesses in the network
* Larger companies can negotiate individual list of benefits based on individual company needs

The Membership Criteria and Code of Practice, membership fees and benefits will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Management Committee and in full consultation with all the current members.